



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE CRISIS IN THE EAST.

BY KARL BLIND.

IN the midst of the tremendous complication which has so suddenly arisen in the East, the more far-seeing Liberal politicians of Europe anxiously ask themselves: Will the Young Turkish party be able, by a sudden stroke at Constantinople, to work out a reform in the sense of representative government, ere the Empire falls into utter decay?

It is difficult for the best-informed, at this moment, to gauge the strength of that once active progressist party. In France and in Egypt, journals connected with it are published. At Paris, a paper called "The Raiser of the Veil" appears in the Arab language. It is edited by the Emir Ermin Arslan, formerly a high official in the administration of the Lebanon. At Geneva, *Le Croissant* ("The Crescent") is printed under the editorship of Halil Ganem, who in 1876 was a member, for Syria, of the then short-lived Ottoman Parliament.

In London, too, it has been asserted, a Young Turkish organ is published and clandestinely sent to Constantinople. But the most careful inquiry has not enabled me to lay my hands on a copy of it. It needs scarcely be added that the strict supervision of the press in the Ottoman capital, and the severe police regulations existing there, do not render it possible, just now, to bring out opposition journals either in the European or in the Asiatic dominions of the Sultan.

I well remember the Young Turkish paper which was published in London in 1876. Zia Bey and a friend of his were then busily engaged, from the sheltering shores of England, in a literary campaign for the convocation of a parliament. Among the Softas, or theological students of Islam, ideas of reform were rife in those days. The present monarch, Abdul Hamid, had just

come to the throne, and his realm was threatened with war by Russia. As the danger of foreign invasion grew more manifest, the new ruler, a man of thirty-four, felt compelled, under insurrectionary pressure from the more enlightened Mohammedan population, to convoke a representative Assembly to his capital, for the first time in the history of the empire.

So Turks and Armenians, Bulgars, Greeks, Albanese, and various other races of different blood and creed, met to frame fundamental institutions for the common country on the lines of popular self-government. The spirit which animated them—though in that first instance a great number were of necessity mere nominees of the Porte—proved to be an excellent and truly progressive one. I have heard this fact borne witness to by trustworthy and impartial men who were present at the debates, full minutes of which I read at the time. The English Ambassador, Sir Henry Layard, a Liberal, recorded his own appreciative testimony not less clearly.

That first Ottoman Parliament, which met after several popular risings at Constantinople, through the exertions of Midhat Pasha, showed remarkable spirit and courage. It passed a number of liberal laws, claimed full control over the exchequer, made a searching investigation into the corrupt administration of court expenses, resisted all proposals tending to curtail the freedom of the press—in short, acted more independently than many a European legislature. Ignorance only, or wilful untruth, can deny these facts. Aye, even the “unspeakable Turk” proved capable of mending his ways.

It is Midhat Pasha’s constitution that the Young Turkish party wishes now to be re-introduced. Rumors have reached England that when Kiamil Pasha was recently raised to the vizierate, even some of the more sensible “Old Turks” were open to suggestions for the establishment of parliamentary institutions. Kiamil, it is alleged, had already prepared a communication to the Turkish papers concerning the intention of doing something in that direction; but at the last moment, he had to withdraw this semi-official note. A representation, said to have been made by him to the Sultan, that “henceforth the dominant influence ought to be with the ministers at the Porte rather than at the Palace,” was ungraciously received. Immediately afterwards he was deposed and practically exiled.

All this shows that there are strange possibilities, if not probabilities, under present circumstances—provided there is not a sudden catastrophe of another kind. A secret body of men, calling themselves the “Ottoman Committee of Union and Progress,” and kindred groups, are issuing manifestoes for the convocation of a parliament. The 119 articles of the Constitution, published with the Sultan’s sign manual on December 23, 1876, in a Turkish and French text, thus acquire a potential importance, although just now nobody can say anything with certainty on a subject presenting so many difficulties. At all events, let us look at the main points of that ground-law of nineteen years ago.

In the place of the despotic sultanate, a constitutional monarchy was to be established. All the populations of the empire, without discrimination of origin or creed, were henceforth regarded as Osmanli, or full citizens. While remaining Protector of the State Religion, the Sultan was to be surrounded by responsible ministers. He only retained the usual privileges of a constitutional ruler in our part of the world. There was to be a Senate and a House of Deputies, with payment of members. The vote at parliamentary elections was to be secret. Every 50,000 male citizens were to elect one member of the House. Every Deputy was held to represent not merely his constituency, but the nation at large. No member could be arrested or prosecuted without the consent of the Chamber.

Freedom of the press, equality before the law, admission of all citizens to State employments, liberty in matters of public instruction for all denominations, obligatory popular instruction, an equal imposition of taxes in accordance with the amount of property, free exercise of every religious cult, abolition of torture and of confiscation of property—such were a few of the general principles of the Constitution.

In Parliament, the initiative in bringing in bills belonged both to ministers and to private members. The budget was to be fixed every year by the House of Commons. In case of an adverse vote, the monarch had to change his Cabinet, or to dissolve Parliament and to order new elections. The House of Commons had the right of bringing ministers to trial before the High Court of Justice. A minister thus charged was in the meantime suspended. Judges were irremovable. The procedures of all tri-

bunals were public, even as the sittings of the representatives of the people. In the administration of the provinces there was to be decentralization. In the provinces, the districts and the cantons, special councils had to be formed on the elective principle.

Not so bad, after all, for Turkey. There are worse constitutions in more highly cultured countries. What if the Autocrat of all the Russias had been asked to follow such an example? Instead of that, he was urged on by a Liberal Premier of England to march in and attack Turkey, whilst this promising germ of freedom was rising from the ground among what had been called, with a deplorable want of philanthropic sentiment, the "one anti-human specimen of humanity." Strange to say, the signal was given, among English Liberals, for crying down the most laudable aspirations of the Young Turks, and for continuing to invoke the blessings of the Cossack lance upon the wretched Mohammedan. The end was easy to foresee. On the outbreak of that deadly contest, in which the victors committed nameless barbarities—as was afterwards fully described in the chief organ of London Liberalism itself—the first Ottoman Parliament was dissolved, much to the relief of the diplomatists of St. Petersburg.

Those who know the history of the wars waged by Russia against Turkey are well aware that, whenever the latter began some home reform, the Czars, after having denounced her misgovernment, hastened to fall upon her, sword in hand. This policy became a confirmed maxim. It was cynically avowed in a famous dispatch by one of the most eminent diplomatists in the time of Alexander I. and Nicholas—namely, Count Pozzo di Borgo. Speaking of the war of 1828–29, he says that "at first there might have existed some doubts as to the urgency of taking up arms against the Porte," but "when it was seen that the reforms then introduced would have the effect of consolidating the Ottoman Empire," the Russian government could not hesitate any longer in attacking it. Pozzo di Borgo literally goes on :

"The Emperor (Nicholas) has put the Turkish system to the proof, and his Majesty has found it to *possess a commencement of physical and moral organization* which it hitherto had not. If the Sultan has been enabled to offer us a more determined and regular resistance whilst he had scarcely assembled together the elements of his new plan of reform and ameliorations, how

formidable should we have found him *had he had time to give it more solidity*, and to render that barrier impenetrable which we find so much difficulty in surmounting, although art has hitherto done so little to assist nature. Things being in this state we must congratulate ourselves upon having attacked them before they became dangerous for us; for delay would only have rendered our relative situation worse, and prepared us greater obstacles than those with which we meet."

This speaks for itself. Perhaps it gives a clue also to the present attitude of the Russian government, as evidenced in the curious letter addressed by its ambassador at Constantinople, Mr. Nelidoff, to the Armenian Patriarch.

The diplomatists of St. Petersburg fear, in fact, nothing more than that the Porte should find itself driven to effect large reforms and be allowed time to accomplish them. They do not recognize the right of Europe to solve the Eastern question by a concert of Powers. They tacitly maintain the traditional claim of Russia to the possession of Constantinople. And they mean always to choose their own time for striking a decisive blow—not in the interest of Europe, but of Russia. Therefore they often follow a zig-zag policy, tacking to and fro; not minding even for a while to abandon the Armenians, although aiming at the conquest of further territory in Asia Minor, where Armenians mostly dwell among Turks, Kurds and other races of the polyglot Ottoman Empire.

Years ago, after the war of France against Germany, and before that of Russia against Turkey, I had occasion to fully discuss these vexed Eastern affairs and Russian policy in Central Asia, with Lord Beaconsfield, then still Mr. Disraeli, for about an hour. He himself had sought the interview on hearing that I was dining in the House of Commons with a friend of his, a Liberal Scottish member, the representative of a great aristocratic family in the North.

Perhaps, before going into details, I may be allowed to state that, for a long time previous—even in the days preceding the Crimean War—I had taken an active part in making larger numbers of men in England acquainted with the designs of Russian Autocracy in the East. At that epoch, the English mind was far more isolated from the currents of Continental thought, far more of the secluded islander's cast, than it is

at present. The history of European countries was to most Englishmen a book sealed with seven seals. Muscovite policy, in its more complicated and crafty aspects, was well nigh exclusively dealt with by David Urquhart, who had once filled a post in the English embassy at Constantinople, and by his small but resolute school of adherents. But the eccentricities in which he, despite his undoubted knowledge and merits, too often indulged by way of exaggeration, were only too apt to alienate the somewhat Philistine common sense of the great mass and of practical statesmen.

Having for years made Russian history a special study from the sources, I strongly felt in the early fifties that a new war against Turkey was coming on. Most European nations were lying under the yoke of an absolutistic reaction which had followed the overthrow of the promising Democratic movements of 1848-49. This was the psychological moment selected by Czardom for making a new spring at Constantinople. Under the impression that such an attempt was certain, I wrote in the same Liberal London journal—then very influential among the English masses—in which Urquhart often expounded his views, a long series of historical sketches, entitled, “The Universal Empire of the Cossacks.” It gave an account of all the attempts made by Russia upon Constantinople since the foundation of the Empire under Rurik. Incidentally it described the tortuous ways and manners of Muscovite policy. Later on, in the same journal, throughout the Crimean war, and for many years afterwards, there appeared regularly leading articles from my pen on Eastern affairs.

No sooner had some of the historical sketches entitled “The Universal Empire of the Cossacks” appeared, than a former English Ambassador, Lord Ponsonby, wrote a flattering letter to the Editor, inquiring after the author’s name. David Urquhart did the same through his confidant, Major Roland, asking for a personal interview with the writer. Having, however, been but a short time in London as an exile, and thinking that, if the authorship were boasted about, some native prejudice against “foreign influence” might be raised by those who, like Cobden and Bright, were averse to England’s participation in any Continental war, I resolved upon preserving anonymity.

I only mention those details to show that the questions now again at issue had occupied me for a good while past before meet-

ing Mr. Disraeli. I will add that when the Crimean war came, the chief proscribed leaders of Democracy, Mazzini, Ledru-Rollin, Kossuth, and others, gave forth no uncertain sound in favor of armed European opposition to the dangerous designs of Russia.

Now, in the ample conversation I had years afterwards in presence of Sir Tollemache Sinclair, the Liberal Scottish member, with the famed Tory leader, I confess I was astonished to find that even then the latter, did not at all seem to be properly aware of the connection of the various Panslavistic movements in Austria-Hungary and Turkey with Russian agencies. As I endeavored to explain the ramifications of those movements, some of which were carried on under pseudo-democratic disguise, he listened with manifestly eager attention. I showed how real race-yearnings were mixed up with the crafty scheming of men who simply worked for Russian universal dominion. Mr. Disraeli, whom everything passing in the democratic camp naturally interested, as he had himself begun as a Radical, was quite astounded when he heard what Alexander Herzen, whom I have intimately known, and who is generally regarded as a firm representative of the cause of freedom, had written on the subject of Panslavism or rather Pan-Russianism.

Herzen did not scruple to indulge in mocking phrases about what he called the "corrupt blood of the Germano-Romanic world," which, he said, "must be reinvigorated by the young barbarian world of Russia!" All Europe, not Turkey alone, was to him a "sick man" whom it would be best to "take by the throat and finish off." Russia was to be the heir of that sick man. Putting forward a Russian peasant of his own invention, Herzen made that poor, benighted personage, who certainly is not strong in political geography, revolve the question in his mind whether Vienna (!), St. Petersburg, Warsaw, Kieff, or Moscow should be the Russian capital of the future. Finally, he made him decide for "Constantinople as the capital of the United Slavo-Greeks."

Though Mr. Disraeli spoke very cautiously on Turkish and Hungarian affairs, a considerable agreement of views appeared to come out in the course of our conversation. "Certainly," he said, "it would be a great misfortune if the Panslavist movement were to shake Austria deeply. She is our old ally!"

I replied: "A strong Germany, in alliance with Austria-Hungary, could only be welcome to England. Intelligent Liberals,

Democrats and Conservatives should seek to prevent a premature collapse of Turkey, as long as the overgrown Empire of the Czar stands there in threatening form, and the dividing wall of Poland is not restored." This was said about six years or so before the formation of the alliance between the German Empire and Austria-Hungary, which, by the later accession of Italy, became the Triple Alliance.

When we approached the Central Asian question a divergence of opinion at once came out. "The Russians," observed the Tory leader, "have now enough on their hands in Central Asia. And, after all, I do not think there is any cause for complaint or alarm in that direction."

"You will pardon me," I answered, "when I say that I have never been able to understand how quietly England, upon the whole, nay, with what surprising assent not a few men here have regarded this pushing forward of Russia through Independent Tartary. After all, her final aim is India!"

Mr. Disraeli quickly felt the sting of these words. Contrary to his custom of sitting with a curious immobility of body and face, he moved about a little with apparent uneasiness. Then he said: "It is, however, still a very long way from the Russian to the Indian frontier!"

I will not go into further details beyond mentioning that I sought to show what perils were created for English rule in Southern Asia by this constantly nearer approach of Russian power to Afghanistan, and how England, in proportion to this closer approach, became more and more incapacitated for an effective defence against a fresh Russian assault in the direction of Constantinople. Such a renewed war I thought was not far off. It came, indeed, a few years after this conversation.

Mr. Disraeli, who had received us in the most graceful manner, accompanied us to the door with kind words and thanks to me.

In public, as is well known, his attitude was generally a sarcastic one, with a strong touch of cynicism. In Parliament, he usually sat with the aspect almost of an Egyptian idol, not moving a muscle, whilst attacks came down upon him like a hailstorm. But all that he said on this occasion was uttered in so agreeable and obliging a manner that the impression created was an entirely different one. His utterances were quiet, measured, dignified,

yet withal warm. No ambiguous remark came from his lips. He also confirmed, with evident frankness, what Sir Tollemache Sinclair had reminded me of, before we saw him—namely, that in 1870 he “had looked upon the attack of France against Germany as a great and grievous wrong.” On this point we were all agreed.

Tories are generally, though rather erroneously, regarded as having always been identified with the idea of resistance against Russia. Yet, from the days of the Duke of Wellington, not a few eminent English Conservatives might be quoted as proofs of a want of foresight, especially in regard to the ulterior aims of Russia. I was, therefore, doubly curious to see how the Tory leader with whom I had discussed these matters, would act in 1876–77.

He certainly opposed Russian designs when Constantinople was finally imperilled. I believe he would have acted still more strongly had he not been hampered in his own Cabinet by Lord Derby, the Foreign Secretary, who, after having done his best to shield Russia against threatened hostilities, at last left the Ministry. Here it should be brought to recollection that Disraeli had, in his earlier parliamentary life, been efficiently patronized by the father of Lord Derby. It was at a time when narrow prejudices of the squirearchy against the “Jewish adventurer” seemed to be an insurmountable bar to his political career. Owing to this circumstance, Disraeli, as Premier, was unwilling to rid himself of his Foreign Secretary. And thus the action of England was hampered.

But even in 1876 Disraeli still labored under the delusion that he could draw off Russia from her intended prey in Europe by showing her the way to further Asiatic conquests. Whilst exerting himself to stop the Czar from seizing Constantinople, the Conservative Premier exclaimed in the House of Commons: “I am not one of that school which views the advances of Russia in Asia with deep misgivings. I think that Asia is large enough for the destinies of both Russia and England.” And again: “Far from looking forward with alarm to the development of Russia in Central Asia, I see no reason why they should not conquer Tartary any more than why England should not have conquered India.”

These are the words which Lord Salisbury recently, at the Lord

Mayor's banquet, called "the great words of Lord Beaconsfield," making them his own parole. But it was Lord Salisbury also who once had said that those who are alarmed at the advance of Russia in Central Asia, had best buy maps on a very large scale, in order to see how far the distance is still to India. Since that remarkable observation, Russia has pushed her frontier up to, nay, even into, the outlying bulwark of India—that is, Afghanistan—and, moreover, has crept upon the Roof of the World, coming at the English even from the other side. Here I may record what an Afghan prince, Iskander Khan, who has served in the Russian army, once said to me. "Our rocky country," he declared, "serves as a protecting bastion to English dominion in India. We are well placed by nature in our stronghold, and we are warlike in a high degree. But we are much divided amongst ourselves as tribes and by feuds. If once the Russians should succeed in lodging themselves there, it will be utterly impossible to dislodge them again."

Let me add that all the historical invasions of India—barring the gradual formation of English rule there—have passed by way of Afghanistan!

I believe if Lord Beaconsfield were alive to-day, he, too, would look with dismay upon the rapid advance of Russia right through Central Asia into the very bulwark which lies before India. Nor would he have enjoyed the spectacle of an English general, arriving as a plenipotentiary for the regulation of the Afghan frontier in concert with Russian delegates, being ignominiously put to flight by a Cossack troop—an insult and a breach of international law which a Liberal Premier quietly allowed to pass unavenged.

Yet the government of St. Petersburg had successively given the most definite promises to the English government that neither Khiva, nor Merv, nor Sarakhs would be annexed, and that "His Imperial Majesty the Emperor looks upon Afghanistan as completely outside the sphere within which Russia may be called upon to exercise her influence"; also, "that no intervention or interference whatever, opposed to the independence of that state, enters into His Majesty's calculations." Once such a promise was given through Count Schouvaloff to Queen Victoria in person, "on the word of honor of a gentleman," by Alexander II. The result we all know.

Extraordinary as it may sound, the real objects of Muscovite policy have been far better understood, for a long time past, by the leaders of public opinion, nay, by large masses of ordinarily intelligent men, abroad, than by not a few of the foremost statesmen in the country most nearly concerned in that matter. On this subject Count Cavour and Mazzini, otherwise politically estranged, were of the same view. Both held that if Russia were allowed free egress for its naval and military power into the Mediterranean, and Constantinople were to fall into her hands, the danger to Italy and to Europe at large would be enormous. They thought it would be the first step to the world-dominion of Czardom. After all, this was the idea also of Napoleon I., who may be considered an expert on such a subject.

Since the present crisis began, there have been all kinds of extraordinary proposals—some of them of old date, but newly furbished up; others, quite new and eccentric, such as the plan of a “Partition of Turkey” between Russia, France, Austria-Hungary, England, Italy, Bulgaria, Servia, and Greece. The author of that last scheme is a member of the English House of Commons, who is at the head of the Anglo-American Committee, and who has introduced an Armenian deputation at Hawarden.

The opening of the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus to the men-of-war of all nations is one of the old projects recently broached again. On that subject Sir M. Grant Duff, once a Liberal Under-Secretary of State of India, and ex-Governor of Madras, and one of the few who understand foreign affairs thoroughly, wrote some years back :

“The provisions of the Treaty of Paris in that behalf apply not to Russia only, but to all the world. Supposing Piccadilly (the well-known London street) were a strait of the sea, miles and miles in length, from either side of which London rose on a gradual slope, so that a fleet steaming leisurely through it could blow the whole city to pieces, would it be endurable that all the fleets of the world should sail up and down it at their own sweet will? And if not all the fleets of the world, why particularly the one fleet which is far the most dangerous? Supposing Constantinople ever became Russian, does the newest school of Russophiles really believe that Russia would allow armed vessels to pass between Stamboul and Scutari? . . . Surely, under no circumstances, as long as a great city and its suburbs extend from the Sea of

Marmora almost to the Symplegades, could you allow the Bosphorus to be treated as if it were the Straits of Dover."

Not less forcibly did Sir Algernon Borthwick, a Conservative, once speak on that subject at a great public meeting. He pointed out that the passage through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles is free to the commerce of the world. But if Russia, he said, had unhindered ingress and egress for her warships, "she could to-morrow send her Baltic fleet into the Black Sea. Her object in asking for this free passage is to obtain the mastery of those waters and the control of the Turkish capita.. . . The power of Russia would be so great that we should have to maintain large fleets to counterbalance it. We should have to maintain a Black Sea fleet as well as a Mediterranean squadron; and this measure, which is falsely represented to be one of peace, would add immensely to the burdens of the English taxpayer and the political dangers of Europe."

In the present disturbed and most grave conditions of affairs, the various great powers have asked for an additional gunboat of each of them being allowed to enter the Straits. Their demand, after some delay, has been granted. The principle enunciated by the Treaty of Paris, and so ably explained by Sir Grant Duff and Sir Algernon Borthwick (now Lord Glenesk), remains unaffected thereby. It is a rule necessitated by the natural configuration of Constantinople and of the Straits.

As to the plan of a partition of Turkey, all I can say is, that its un wisdom is too patent to require special discussion. If it were carried out, it would simply form the preface to a future general war between the powers concerned. Under these circumstances, one would fain hope against hope that an internal reform of the Ottoman Empire—such as was begun, but unfortunately too quickly crushed, or placed into abeyance—in the days of the Parliament of 1876, were once more attempted at the eleventh hour. If this is not done, the prospects are dark indeed, and Europe may expect a continued era of an ever increasing militarism and a future universal war more terrible than any recorded in the darkest pages of history.

KARL BLIND.